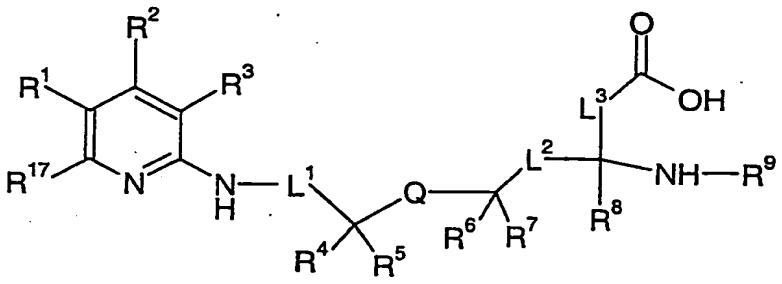
CLAIMS:

1. A compound of formula (I)



(I)

wherein

R^1, R^2, R^3 and R^{17} independently represent H, halogen, C1 to 4 alkyl, C1 to 4 alkoxy, CN, $MeS(O)_m$ or $NR^{10}R^{11}$; said alkyl group being optionally further substituted by OH or one or more halogen atoms;

L^1 represents $CR^{12}R^{13}$ wherein R^{12} and R^{13} independently represent H or C1 to 4 alkyl; said alkyl being optionally further substituted by OH, C1 to 2 alkoxy, CN or one or more halogen atoms;

L^2 represents a bond or $CR^{12}R^{13}$ wherein R^{12} and R^{13} independently represent H or C1 to 4 alkyl; said alkyl being optionally further substituted by OH, C1 to 2 alkoxy, CN or one or more halogen atoms;

L^3 represents $-CH_2-$ or a bond;

R^4, R^5, R^6 and R^7 independently represent H, C1 to 6 alkyl, Ar^1 or Ar^1–C1 to 4 alkyl;

or R^4 and R^5, or R^6 and R^7, may be joined together such that the group CR^4R^5 or the group CR^6R^7 represents a C3 to 6 cycloalkyl ring;

Q represents O, $S(O)_n$ or NR^{16};

R^{16} represents H, C1 to 6 alkyl, C1 to 6 alkanoyl, C1 to 6 alkyl–SO_2–, C1 to 6 alkyl–O–CO–, Ar^2 or Ar^2–CH_2–;

Ar^1 and Ar^2 independently represents phenyl or a 5- or 6-membered heteroaromatic ring containing one to three heteroatoms independently selected from O, S and N; said phenyl or heteroaromatic ring being optionally substituted by one or more substituents independently selected from halogen, CN, CF_3, C1 to 3 alkyl, C1 to 3 alkoxy, hydroxy, C1 to 3 thioalkoxy or $NR^{14}R^{15}$;

m and n independently represent an integer 0, 1 or 2;

R^8 represents H or C1 to 4 alkyl; said alkyl being optionally further substituted by OH, C1 to 2 alkoxy, CN or one or more halogen atoms;

R^9 represents H or C1 to 4 alkyl;

R^{10} and R^{11} independently represent H, C1 to 2 alkyl, C1 to 2 alkanoyl or C1 to 2 alkylsulfonyl;

R^{14} and R^{15} independently represent H, C1 to 4 alkyl, C1 to 2 alkyl–SO_2–, or C1 to 4 alkanoyl; said alkyl being optionally further substituted by OH, C1 to 2 alkoxy, CN or one or more halogen atoms;

and pharmaceutically acceptable salts thereof.

2. A compound according to Claim 1 wherein Q represents S.

3. A compound of formula (I), according to Claim 1, which is:
S-[2-[(4-methyl-2-pyridinyl)amino]ethyl]-L-cysteine;
S-[2-[(4-methoxy-2-pyridinyl)amino]ethyl]-L-cysteine;
S-[2-[(4-methyl-2-pyridinyl)amino]pentyl]-L-cysteine;
S-[2-[(4-methyl-2-pyridinyl)amino]propyl]-L-cysteine;
or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

4. A compound of formula (I), according to any one of Claims 1 to 3, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, for use as a medicament.

5. A pharmaceutical composition comprising a compound of formula (I) according to any one of Claims 1 to 3, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, in admixture with a pharmaceutically acceptable adjuvant, diluent or carrier.

6. The use of a compound of formula (I) according to any one of Claims 1 to 3, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, in the manufacture of a medicament for the treatment or prophylaxis of human diseases or conditions in which inhibition of nitric oxide synthase activity is beneficial.

7. The use as claimed in Claim 6 wherein it is predominantly inducible nitric oxide synthase that is inhibited.

8. The use of a compound of formula (I) as defined in any one of Claims 1 to 3, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, in the manufacture of a medicament, for the treatment or prophylaxis of inflammatory diseases.

9. The use as claimed in Claim 8 wherein the disease is rheumatoid arthritis.

10. The use as claimed in Claim 8 wherein the disease is osteoarthritis.

11. The use of a compound of formula (I) as defined in any one of Claims 1 to 3, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, in the manufacture of a medicament, for the treatment or prophylaxis of pain.

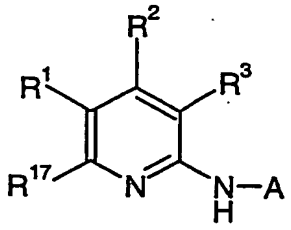
12. The use of a compound of formula (I) as defined in any one of Claims 1 to 3, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, in combination with a COX-2 inhibitor, in the manufacture of a medicament, for the treatment or prophylaxis of inflammatory diseases.

13. A method of treating, or reducing the risk of, human diseases or conditions in which inhibition of nitric oxide synthase activity is beneficial which comprises administering a therapeutically effective amount of a compound of formula (I), as defined in any one of Claims 1 to 3, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof, to a person suffering from, or at increased risk of, such diseases or conditions.

14. A method of treating, or reducing the risk of, inflammatory disease in a person suffering from, or at risk of, said disease, wherein the method comprises administering to the person a therapeutically effective amount of a compound of formula (I), as defined in any one of Claims 1 to 3, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof.

15. A process for the preparation of a compound of formula (I), as defined in any one of Claims 1 to 3, or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt, enantiomer or racemate thereof, wherein the process [wherein variable groups are, unless otherwise specified, as defined in Claim 1] comprises:

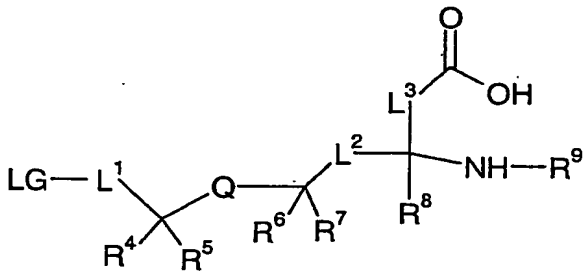
(a) reaction of a compound of formula (II)



(II)

wherein A represents H, alkanoyl or carboxyalkanoyl,

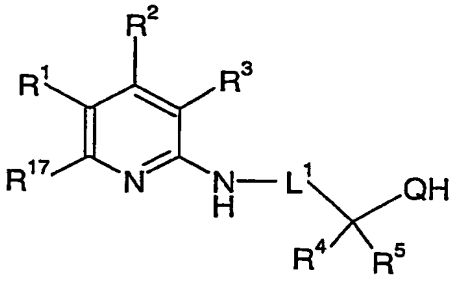
with a compound of formula (III)



(III)

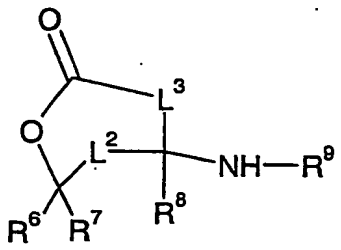
wherein LG represents a leaving group; or

(b) when Q represents S, reaction of a compound of formula (IV)



(IV)

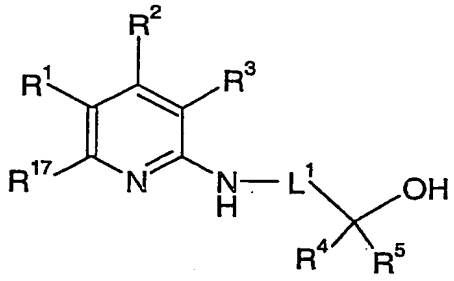
with a compound of formula (V)



(V)

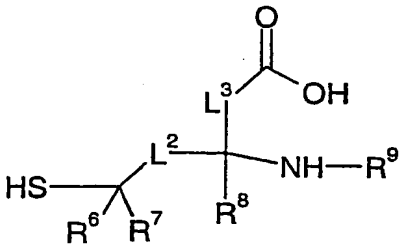
or

(c) when Q represents S, reacting a compound of formula (VI)



(VI)

with a compound of formula (VII)



(VII)

under Mitsunobu conditions;

and where desired or necessary converting the resultant compound of formula (I), or another salt thereof, into a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof; or converting one compound of formula (I) into another compound of formula (I); and where desired converting the resultant compound of formula (I) into an optical isomer thereof.